UN

UNITED NATIONS

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General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.105/C.2/SR.557
6 April 1992

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

LEGAL SUBCOMMITTEE

Thirty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 557th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 2 April 1992, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MIKULKA (Czechoslovakia)

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The elaboration of draft principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space, with the aim of finalizing the draft set of principles (continued)

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GE.92-61069/3570H

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

THE ELABORATION OF DRAFT PRINCIPLES RELEVANT TO THE USE OF NUCLEAR POWER SOURCES IN OUTER SPACE, WITH THE AIM OF FINALIZING THE DRAFT SET OF PRINCIPLES (agenda item 3) (continued) (A/AC.105/484; A/AC.105/513; A/AC.46/20; A/AC.105/L.154/Rev.11)

Ms. VENTURINI (Italy) said that her delegation was fully satisfied with the positive results which the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its Subcommittees had achieved on the draft principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space. Consensus had thus been reached on the applicability of international law, guidelines for safe use, notification of re-entry and assistance to States, consultations, responsibility, liability and compensation and settlement of disputes.

The Legal Subcommittee now had to adopt the preamble and principle 12, on the one hand, and principles 1 A and 4, on the other. Her delegation looked forward to cooperating in the constructive spirit shown by all delegations so that a decision on those principles might be reached as soon as possible. The Subcommittee should bear in mind, however, that, because of the importance of the issues involved, only a genuine consensus could lead to an effective universal code of conduct to govern the activities of States in outer space.

Agreed principles for the use of nuclear power sources in outer space would be needed soon in order to ensure that the timely development of the high energy capabilities of States was not hampered by technical and political problems and that the confidence of States in the applications of nuclear power sources was not eroded. Great skill would thus be required to strike a fair balance between the interests of States which legitimately pursued the peaceful uses of outer space and the need to ensure that their actions did not endanger persons, property and the environment. The scope and wording of the principles also had to be clearly understood to avoid any risk of ambiguity. Substantial progress appeared to have been made in efforts to achieve those objectives.

A problem to which her delegation had drawn attention on earlier occasions was that the preservation of the outer space environment was closely related to all national and international space activities. Collisions between space objects with nuclear power sources on board and even a small fragment of space debris would have very serious consequences. Measures to limit the production of space debris would therefore have to supplement measures to ensure the safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space. That issue should be given careful consideration by the Committee and its Subcommittees in their discussions of the legal aspects of international cooperation.

Ms. GRAEFIN von ROEDERN (Germany) said that, as a result of the Subcommittee's constructive discussions in the past week, agreement had been reached on a number of unresolved issues. If the remaining problems were also tackled in a constructive way, it should be possible for the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space to adopt the entire set of draft principles at

its forthcoming session. As the draft principles dealt with high technology, a revision clause enabling the Committee to react to new developments and technologies from a legal and technical point of view was extremely important.

After 13 years of deliberations, joint efforts by all delegations would continue to be necessary for the adoption of the set of draft principles. In that connection, the Chairman of the Working Group on Nuclear Power Sources was to be congratulated on the efforts he had made to achieve a consensus.

Mr. TETU (Canada) said that he endorsed the views expressed by the representative of Germany and joined in her tribute to the Chairman of the Working Group on Nuclear Power Sources. A great deal of work on the outstanding principles had been done in the past week and he was confident that a consensus could be achieved with only a little more time and effort.

The CHAIRMAN announced that the Subcommittee had completed its consideration of agenda item 3.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.